

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES &
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP
RELATIONS

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June 22, 2022

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HELD AT: HYBRID HEARING, COUNCIL CHAMBERS,
CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Chi A. Ossé, Chairperson

COUNCILMEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Crystal Hudson
Farah N. Louis
Sandra Ung

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Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs

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Research and Advocacy Manager, Dance/NYC

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, ladies and
3 gentlemen, and welcome to the Council chambers.
4 We're here... We're gathered here today for the
5 hybrids committee hearing of Cultural Affairs,
6 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations.
7 If there's anybody here that wants to testify, even
8 if you signed in already on our website, and you're
9 here personally, just sign in with the Sergeant at
10 Arms over at the table on the left... excuse me, on
11 your right. If you have any written statements, hold
12 on to those statements until your name is called to
13 testify. At that point, the sergeant will ask you
14 for it and disseminate that information to the
15 members. If you have any electronic devices that are
16 going to make noise during the hearing, please turn
17 the audio off. Okay? Please turn the audio off on
18 any electronic devices. If you have any questions,
19 just get the attention of one of the Sergeant At Arms
20 and we'll be more than happy to answer your questions
21 to the best of our ability. Okay. For the people
22 that are on Zoom. If you want to submit any written
23 testimony, you can do so at testimony... excuse me,
24 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is

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3 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair, we're ready to
4 begin.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Good morning and welcome to
6 our oversight hearing on cultural institutions and
7 access for individuals with disabilities. My name is
8 Councilmember Chi Ossé, Chair of the Committee on
9 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
10 Intergroup Relations. I would like to thank everyone
11 for joining us here today, as well as online. Before
12 we speak about what true access means for people with
13 disabilities in the New York City culture sector, I
14 think it's important to frame this discussion within
15 the context and brief history of the struggle for
16 disability rights in America.

17 On September 13, 1960, the Social Security
18 amendments of 1960 were signed into law, ostensibly
19 protecting the civil rights of all people with
20 disabilities. For the first time ever, people under
21 the age of 50 were allowed to receive Social Security
22 Disability Insurance benefits. Then in 1964,
23 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights
24 Act into law prohibiting discrimination and
25 segregation and public spaces, and employment
discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion,

or national origin. The Civil Rights Act served as the foundation for the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, acknowledging that discrimination and prejudice are in fact, being expressed towards those with disabilities in the United States, and banned discrimination on the basis of disability for organizations that received federal funds. In 1975, the Individuals with Disability Act idea was signed into law requiring equal educational opportunities for all. Finally, in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA was signed into law. The ADA was modeled after the Civil Rights Act, and affirms and protects the rights of those with disabilities with regard to employment, government services, and many other aspects of public life. While the ADA was a huge step forward and acknowledging the need to ensure equity for all Americans, it was nonetheless an underfunded mandate. While many positive changes have occurred, often compliance with ADA mandates have been slow to become a reality, specifically in the private and nonprofit sector. Making things accessible often means making things more expensive. At a recent nonprofit cultural event, organizers shared with Council representatives that while their

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3 aim was to protect to provide a cultural experience
4 that everyone could enjoy, the cost of providing
5 interpretation services rent upwards of \$30,000 for a
6 two-week event, for many organizations still
7 recovering from losses incurred due to COVID-19, this
8 presents a struggle. In 2015 pursuant to Local Law
9 46, New York City lawmakers were tasked with
10 developing a comprehensive Cultural Plan for New York
11 City. In 2017, the city released that plan entitled
12 CreateNYC, which included 92 recommendations. Many
13 recommended actions focused on the need to expand
14 arts and cultural resources to every community with a
15 promise to provide support to individual artists,
16 cultural workers, and audiences with disabilities.
17 In 2019, an update to CreateNYC was unveiled in the
18 form of an action plan. The action plan called for a
19 continuation of investments and funding for
20 underserved neighborhoods, and increased support from
21 the Cultural Institutions Group, otherwise known as
22 the CIC, and expanded access to arts and cultural
23 venues and arts organizations in order to meet the
24 needs, diversity, and inclusion for all.

25 This hearing seeks to explore the current state
of access to New York's cultural venues for

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3 individuals with disabilities and their companions
4 and caregivers in hopes of gaining a better
5 understanding of what is needed to fulfill the
6 mandate of CreateNYC, and how DCLA and the city may
7 better support efforts to expand access and promote
8 engagement to all cultural institutions for people
9 with disabilities now and in the future. Our
10 cultural institutions are places where neighbors can
11 learn about new cultures and stories, engage in
12 dialogue that shifts societal narratives, and
13 experience joy and excitement. And it is key that
14 everyone is able to enjoy all that cultural community
15 has to offer. It is imperative that we provide
16 accommodations so that all our neighbors and the
17 visitors we welcome to our great city can access our
18 arts and culture, the key to what makes New York City
19 the vibrant and colorful city it is. Today we look
20 forward to hearing from the new DCLA Commissioner,
21 Laurie Cumbo, about the administration's commitment
22 to accessible programming and also look forward to
23 hearing from the advocates and other interested
24 stakeholders. I would also like to thank the
25 community members, artists and program staff who have
joined us today. We are grateful for your

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3 partnership and look forward to learning how we can
4 better support you. I'd also like to acknowledge my
5 staff, my legislative and budget director, May
6 Vutrepan[sp?] Katana[sp?]. And my Chief of Staff,
7 Naomi Hopkins, as well as our committee staff who
8 made this hearing possible, Brenda McKinney, my
9 Committee Counsel, Christy Dwyer, my Legislative
10 Policy Analyst, and Alia Lee, the Finance Unit Head.
11 I will now ask our Committee Counsel to administer
12 the oath.

13 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you. If you can please
14 raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the
15 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
16 before this committee and to respond honestly to
17 Councilmember questions today?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I do.

19 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you. Commissioner Cumbo,
20 you may begin your testimony.

21 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Good morning, and it
22 exciting to be on this side of the table today. I'm
23 so happy to be here with all of you. Good morning
24 Chair Chi Ossé, and members of the committee. I am
25 Cultural Affairs Commissioner, Laurie Cumbo. Thank
you for inviting me to testify on today's topic,

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3 Cultural Institutions and Access for Individuals with
4 Disabilities.

5 And I just want to applaud this committee because
6 this is a really important hearing, and I'm so proud
7 that you have decided to do this at the early part of
8 your tenure as a City Councilmember. This will give
9 us all increased time and opportunity to advance this
10 cause collectively and together.

11 For years, the Department of Cultural Affairs has
12 dedicated tremendous energy and resources to ensuring
13 that our cultural community is both open and
14 welcoming to people with disabilities. We believe
15 that our cultural sector is going to truly thrive and
16 serve all New Yorkers, we must make sure that
17 everyone is given opportunities to participate.
18 Foregrounding disability access is a matter of social
19 justice, fairness and equity. For decades, we've
20 worked with cultural groups to increase access to
21 their institutions. Through our capital program, the
22 city has long been a partner in assisting cultural
23 institutions to become more physically accessible.
24 And while it's a critical component, physical access
25 is just one dimension of creating cultural
opportunities that connect people with disabilities.

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3 With the DCLA's groundbreaking Diversity, Equity, and
4 Inclusion Initiative, and the 2017 release of the
5 CreateNYC Cultural Plan, which I was excited to
6 participate in, we initiated legislation that I
7 sponsored in the City Council. DCLA focused greater
8 attention on creating more cultural engagement with
9 and for people with disabilities, and not just as
10 audiences, but as artists and cultural workers.

11 Before expanding on that point, I want to
12 highlight the great work being done to ensure that
13 people with disabilities have every opportunity to
14 participate in the cultural life of our city as
15 audience members. With the joyful return to live
16 programming in full force, which I've seen our
17 Commissioner participating in with the greatest
18 energy that the city has seen, our fellow city
19 agencies are making accessible cultural programs easy
20 to find and connect with. At the Mayor's Office for
21 People with Disabilities, they maintain the list of
22 cultural and recreational resources for people with
23 disabilities, including institutions that offer
24 reduced fares and accessible programming, and NYC and
25 companies accessible NYC includes guides to make many
attractions accessible for people with disabilities,

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from whole neighborhood cultural attractions to specific institutions. Cultural organizations are themselves also leading the way with comprehensive web pages, accessibility focused map, and reserve services and hours for people with disabilities and their caregivers. We've encouraged groups in these efforts by, among other things, offering guidance on best practices for accessibility information, and public event notices and invitations. While groups aren't legally required to follow the same local regulations as government agencies, we push them to provide event accessibility information upfront in email blasts, invitations, and social media as practical ways to demonstrate that people with disabilities are welcome at the venue, and to provide information necessary to allow meaningful access to programs. Beyond the simple yet impactful practices, many cultural organizations provide induction loops and other assistive listening devices and offer programming and hours specifically designed for Neuro diverse audiences. Recently, the administration has worked to spread the word about a new requirement to improve access at movie theaters for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. There's more that can and

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3 needs to be done to include people with disabilities
4 as audiences, but excellent models exist across our
5 cultural community, and we look to further promote
6 and expand on the great work that's already being
7 done.

8 As part of CreateNYC, DCLA committed to investing
9 capital funds in accessibility infrastructure
10 projects. In the first year alone, DCLA provided
11 over \$15 million in city capital funds for
12 accessibility projects. That's why I'm so happy that
13 we were able to work with the City Council to expand
14 capital funding to our cultural institutions this
15 year, which is going to allow us to do so much more.
16 These funds continue to support a range of projects
17 such as garden-wide accessibility improvements at
18 Brooklyn Botanic Garden. This project is fully aimed
19 at increasing access to BBG for people with
20 disabilities, such as replacing street slopes and
21 stairs with ramps at multiple locations in the
22 garden, and replacing lifts. We've also supported
23 the installation of new and refurbished elevators at
24 groups including Anthology Film Archives, Flushing
25 Town Hall, and Carnegie Hall to name a few. A new
elevator may not sound radical, but they are

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transformative tools in opening up access to spaces within institutions. Organizations are also using capital projects as opportunities to carefully rethink how all audiences can engage with their programming, including people with disabilities. For one example, theater for new audiences, Polonsky Shakespeare Center in Brooklyn was designed so that people using wheelchairs could have prime seats for viewing performances, not just sit in the back of the theater as it was traditionally done.

As I alluded to earlier, CreateNYC helped drive work to more meaningful people with disabilities in our city's cultural life, not just as audiences but as artists and cultural workers. This is critical. The Disability Forward Fund, also known as DFF, was launched in 2018, and provided dedicated grant funding for 22 arts groups in its inaugural year. Since fiscal year 2019 DCLA has provided over \$1.4 million toward DFF grantees, fostering greater accessibility through a wide range of projects, and this is just the beginning. DFF invested both in programs aimed at making mainstream institutions more accessible, and in programs deeply rooted in, and committed to the experience of people with

disabilities. Programs supported by DFF have included support for students with disabilities to create original documentaries about their experiences, new and expanded residency programs for dancers with disabilities, development of theatrical production centering experiences of people with disabilities, expanding American Sign Language programming at museums, exhibitions of work by artists with disabilities, and job training programs for people with disabilities, opening up career pathways in the art sector.

Through our Cultural Development Fund, the agency continues to provide support to organizations doing this essential work, including \$500,000 in this current fiscal year. That is why we are so proud of the funding that we were able to partner with the City Council, over \$40 million of an increase to be able to do more work that was just mentioned.

The CreateNYC Language Access Fund launched by DCLA and 2019 also sought to foster more open accessible cultural sector. This fund supported a variety of programs that addressed and highlighted access for users of American Sign Language, also known as ASL. Nearly \$200,000 was awarded to ASL

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3 programs in the first two years of the fund. These
4 included amazing programs like the theatre
5 development funds, accessibility program for
6 students, where our support allowed TDF to offer six
7 Broadway matinee performances interpreted through ASL
8 for young people whose primary Communication is
9 signing. Our grant to the alliance of resident
10 theaters helped create their advanced theatrical ASL
11 interpreters program to ready qualified signers for a
12 career in theater specific interpretation, providing
13 a robust roster of interpreters to meet the high
14 demand of New York City's nonprofit theatre
15 companies, while also deepening relationships with
16 deaf or hard-of-hearing audiences and artists
17 industry wide.

18 DCLA has worked closely with the Mayor's Office
19 for People with Disabilities on a range of programs,
20 most notably offering technical assistance for
21 cultural groups seeking to hire people with
22 disabilities. In 2019, we co-hosted the MOPD,
23 disability and inclusion in the cultural workforce,
24 an event attended by more than 150 representatives of
25 over 90 cultural organizations. Attendees heard
personal perspectives from people with disabilities

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working in the arts. They also learned about local, state, and regional resources offering support and developing more inclusive recruiting, hiring, and retention practices. This program expanded on a similar event in partnership with MOPD in 2018 for the SIG. Thanks to these direct sessions, we've heard stories of cultural groups making direct hires from MOPD's incredible NYC at Work Program, which recruits, pre-screens, and connects New Yorkers with disabilities to jobs and internships. Cultural groups, you need to check this program out if you haven't already. For our cultural sector to be truly inclusive of all residents, we need to make sure we're welcoming talent from every community into employment and decision-making roles. Within the agency, we're also making sure our service for the cultural field and for New Yorkers are accessible to everyone. For instance, DCLA's material for the arts took its Third Thursday and gallery programs virtual and they launched the Online Education Center to help arts educators adapt to the new remote environment. Thousands of art educators have access this amazing new tool since the start of the pandemic. Like so many organizations did during the pandemic, MFTA

discovered that digital programming was a powerful way of connecting with people who might not be able to participate in person for a variety of reasons, including disability. This reflects a broader trend we saw throughout the pandemic. In addition to keeping us connected to one another through trying times, online meetings and programming opened up cultural experiences to people who previously faced barriers to accessing them. With our partners at the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, and NYC and Company we created VirtualNYC to help amplify virtual programs and connect to new audiences. We're thrilled that live experiences are now returning to our city. And we'll continue to support efforts to make in-person programming accessible to everyone.

At the same time, we're pleased that hybrid programming looks like it's here to stay. For the many people who can now experience a new and broader range of cultural activities, the expansion of online Cultural Access has been one of the bright spots on an otherwise difficult couple of years, and I'm looking forward to more programming that brings the hybrid to life. To encourage group's efforts to inclusively reach online audiences in the fall of

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2020 DCLA hosted Accessibility and Inclusion in The
Virtual Space: How Cultural Organizations Can Adapt
and Connect. It featured representatives of the NYC
Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Museum
of Modern Arts, Arts and Culture Access Consortium,
Dances for a Variable Population, and the Queen's
Theatre discussing best practices to increase access
for audiences during the COVID 19 pandemic and
beyond.

With respect to funding opportunities to further
increase access for all qualified organizations, the
Cultural Development Fund applicants now receive
enhanced support in the application process. This
year DCLA also hosted virtual application seminars on
Zoom to reach an ever wider constituency of
applicants. Our agency's Disabilities Service
Facilitator helps ensure that agency programs and
communications are accessible. And even on social
media, every picture we post includes all tech so
that everyone can be informed and engaged. So this
commitment to inclusion truly reaches every part of
our work at the agency.

Again, what we do at DCLA is focused on uplifting
our cultural constituents, so I want to recognize the

incredible work that groups are doing around the city. At Lincoln Center, the Access Ambassadors Job Training Initiative for high school students with disabilities reached 140 Student Ambassadors this year. At Queen's Theatre, last month's Forward Festival featured nine days of performances by artists with disabilities working across disciplines, from circus, to theatre, to dance. At BAM, education youth programs offer Relaxed Performances for Neuro Diverse Audiences. At Wave Hill in the Bronx, attendants who accompany visitors with severe disabilities are given free admission. Staten Island's Arts Teaching Artist Institute last year offer training specifically for art educators interested in working with people with disabilities.

We also support the work of groups whose missions are rooted in disability access, inclusion and artistry, such as Museum Access Consortium, Theater Breaking Through Barriers, and Art Beyond Sight just to name a few.

In conclusion, I applaud you making this a high priority in your first term. I've championed greater access for people with disabilities to a range of resources for years. And as a Councilmember, I

3 sponsored legislation that would establish mental
4 health coordinators in each city agency to offer
5 support for city employees. If we want to create a
6 cultural sector that truly engages every New Yorker,
7 we need to focus on disability inclusion and access
8 and continue to move our community forward and close
9 collaboration with a dedicated advocates doing work
10 in this area. We look forward to championing more
11 work on this issue together. Thank you for the
12 opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any
13 questions that you may have. And we have so much
14 more to share. And we certainly look forward to your
15 questions. And I just want to close by saying: We
16 are so excited to partner with the City Council on
17 this particular initiative. This is something that
18 the previous Council was really excited about.

19 And for me, this testimony was also a little bit
20 difficult, because I'm not a strong advocate for the
21 word "disability". I really see people that are
22 given the... the label of dis disability or disabled
23 is really having a super ability. So the ability to
24 be able to sign, to read Braille, to be able to
25 navigate the city with a service dog or with a stick
through... a walking stick through the MTA and our

transit system. Those are really very, super-powered people, not to mention all of the challenges that they have in navigating the challenges of raising a family, going through the workforce. And so I hope that in the future, we're able to come up with better language, because language matters, and to be labeled disabled to me, I wouldn't want it for myself, and I certainly wouldn't want that for my child. So I think it's important that we, as time goes on, that we begin to change the language so that people feel more inclusive, and that they are not seen as having a deficit, but actually have a gift as a result that none of us have. So I just wanted to put that out there and hope that we can continue the conversation about how to be more inclusive in the city.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much for that, Commissioner. I do want to acknowledge some of my colleagues on the committee, Councilmember Sandra Ung, Councilmember Eric Dinowitz, as well as Councilmember Amanda Farias, and Councilmember Crystal Hudson.

Now I will go into the question portion of our hearing. I wanted to start -- and you definitely touched on this a bit during your testimony -- but

what steps is DCLA taking to ensure that our cultural community can expand accessibility for all New Yorkers?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm so happy that you asked that question, because it allows me to expand on something that I'm excited about. The first major thing that we are doing and have been doing is our capital program. As we stated in the testimony, over \$15 million in capital in previous fiscal years were spent on capital improvements to make sure that our institutions are more accessible. All new construction that begins in the City of New York, has to be done in compliance to make sure that institutions are making and building their spaces with their appropriate accommodations to make sure that all people are welcome. We're looking forward to continuing the programs that we've started within the Department of Cultural Affairs. The funding programs that we have, through the CDF process, allow us to make sure that we are incentivizing the opportunity for organizations to recognize that accessibility is the direction that the city is going in. And we look forward to working also with our city agencies in terms of employment opportunities,

3 and making sure that all New Yorkers, those with
4 disabilities... ugh... that those that have
5 challenges are also welcomed in our New York City's
6 workforce and making sure that they are recruited,
7 nurtured, and welcomed into our city agencies and
8 beyond.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you and regarding
10 capital projects, what is the status of capital
11 projects that are devoted to increasing
12 accessibility?

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, each project that we
14 take On in the Department of Cultural Affairs has a
15 complete cycle in life. So there's no one size fits
16 all. Every organization, some organizations are
17 undergoing ramp and elevator renovations, other
18 projects are doing projects to become more accessible
19 in ways of entrance ways, and making sure that our
20 bathrooms and changing rooms are more accessible. So
21 these are not necessarily the more attractive
22 projects that people are cutting ribbons on, but
23 these are the types of projects that really matter.
24 And every project has its own cycle, in terms of when
25 it's completed. During the pandemic, a lot of the
cycles -- if you have specific projects that you want

to ask about -- during the pandemic, a lot of the cycles were... they slowed down a bit while we were addressing issues during the pandemic, but each project will have its own timeline. And if there are specific projects, we could talk further about it.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And in terms of knowing which spaces need those types of investments, is there something alongside the... the CDF application...? Or how do you intake which community, or cultural organizations, or establishments need those improvements?

CHAIRPERSON CUMBO: Well, many organizations right now, what happens is that when they apply to the city, either to the City Council or to the Department of Cultural Affairs, they decide what initiatives, or what project, or what capital improvements they need at that particular time. So some may decide that they need a brand new HVAC system. Some may see that they need additional lighting. A lot of organizations have come to us with roof repair. So it's something that's in the formula to make sure that organizations... but I imagine that many organizations have to prioritize capital improvements, particularly during COVID, that

have anything to do with HVAC systems, making sure that their organizations have the proper ventilation in their institutions, that they also have the ability to have roof repairs that need to be made. So organizations have the opportunity to prioritize what are their needs, but we certainly look forward to making sure that they understand and know that the City of New York is prioritizing, making sure that accessibility is a huge part of the capital future of the City of New York.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And do you have a breakdown of where these accessibility capital projects are by borough and/or organization size?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We can get that for you, certainly. That's certainly something that we can do, and I'll make sure that my team gets that information to you in terms of by borough where our accessibility projects happening, so that we both can have an opportunity to go on a walking tour to see those institutions and to see the capital improvements that they are making to be accessible to the City of New York.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Absolutely. And how is DCLA helping to make the cultural space and community more

3 accessible for those who are immuno...
4 immunocompromised, especially as the city begins to
5 lift COVID protocols and mask mandates?

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Can you ask that question
7 once more?

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes. How's DCLA helping to
9 make the cultural space and community more accessible
10 for those who are immunocompromised due to COVID-
11 19...

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Right.

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: ...still being prevalent in
14 our city?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So one thing that many
16 institutions have done, because many people during
17 the COVID pandemic... While New York City is open,
18 and people are coming back to the institutions, many
19 people still don't feel comfortable entering into our
20 institutions at this time. So many organizations, as
21 you've seen it over the summer, have taken their
22 programming outdoors so that people will feel safe in
23 -- I don't want to say a post-pandemic, because we
24 are still living through a lot of the challenges of
25 the pandemic -- but many organizations have opened up
their facility and are doing outdoor programming.

Many are doing hybrid and virtual programs. The virtual format has been very helpful to many people who still do not feel comfortable coming into our cultural institutions and our cultural spaces. Many institutions are also continuing mask mandates and many others, we've done a lot of programming in terms of supporting and helping the sector be able to help their staff to manage the expectations that many visitors have when they come to their institutions. Some institutions still require mask mandates, other institutions don't require mask mandates, and to deal with the delta of how people feel, being asked to wear a mask in some places and not in other places.

But as it pertains to the disability community. It's really important that we recognize that there are many initiatives that many organizations that I've outlined here are actually doing to making their spaces more accessible.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And in 2017 the DCLA adopted CreateNYC, and has created an action plan based on that initiative. How did the agency work with a disability community to create an action plan that centers their needs.

3 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The disability community was
4 at the forefront of the CreateNYC program. And as a
5 result of that, that's what spawned in many ways, the
6 capital program and the amount of funding that went
7 into that program. It also created the opportunity
8 through our Cultural Development Fund, to be able to
9 create a space within the Cultural Development Fund,
10 where organizations are able to apply specifically
11 for accessibility funding. So that's something that
12 we want to continue to do in the future years. We
13 were funded in this administration for a Cultural
14 Equity Fund. So we're looking to be able to have
15 that type of funding and programming as part of an
16 initiative to further fund the disability community
17 throughout this process.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Were there any... Or could
19 you name any groups in particular that DCLA worked
20 with in those conversations?

21 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That preceded me before I
22 got here, so I'll definitely have to look at the very
23 specific organizations that worked with the
24 Department of Cultural Affairs for CreateNYC. But
25 we'll definitely get back to you and let you know
more about who were the cultural partners from the

disability community that helped shape and inform
CreateNYC.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And has the agency
also looked at this plan in an intersectional way to
address everyone's specific needs and accommodations?
For example, black and indigenous people of color,
who are disabled, low income disabled folks as well?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think the great benefit
that came out of the pandemic -- and this is part of
looking at the bright side of things that happened or
came out of the pandemic, and you've been on these
calls as well -- the culture at Three Calls have been
really informative in terms of bringing together the
full breadth of the Department of Cultural Affairs
organizations that we fund. And through the culture
at Three Call, we've been able to talk with so many
organizations from the BIPOC community. Since I've
come into... into this particular position, I've had
an opportunity to meet with so many different
organizations throughout the BIPOC community, in
order to discuss greater ways that we can support one
another, to support the industry, and to be able to
create more accessibility for the BIPOC community, as
well as for those that are disabled. So it's

important that we continue to have those conversations together, and again, looking at the Cultural Equity Fund and its creation for the first time in the city, this is going to give us a strong foundation for us to be able to move forward.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for that answer.

And what is the DCLA's progress on implementing the CreateNYC action plan as it relates to expanding access to arts and cultural venues, and organizations for New Yorkers with disabilities?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that what we should focus on at this time is again what was written in the testimony and I just want to express it: Programmatic funding, the Disability Forward Fund is something that came out of CreateNYC, we need to better-fund that, and we need to work collaboratively on both sides of the table in order to be able to do that. Capital funding again is another outcome of it. Elevators, ADA access. Another is employment collaborations, MOPD'S, NYC:ATWORK Program, agency plus sector practices, inclusive-but-accessible meetings, social media, et cetera. But I think the most powerful thing that we can do is just what you're doing right now: This

hearing at this tenure in your career is a really powerful tool to be able to highlight this, to let the agency as well as the advocates know that we're continuing to talk about this, and convenings are probably the most powerful way that we can work collaboratively together to continue this conversation that you're starting so early in your tenure. This gives us a long runway to be able to make real instrumental changes, budgetary changes, the ability to work together on so many of these different initiatives.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I wholeheartedly agree. And thank you for acknowledging that as well. The Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA was passed in 1990, again, with the attention of having a plan in place by 1992, to determine what was accessible and what needed to be changed. However well-intentioned, the ADA was underfunded mandate. Disability advocates and the cultural community have said we don't need another study; we know what the problems are, and that is a lack of funding to provide accessibility. The burden falls on the organizations to provide expensive accommodations to ensure inclusivity and not every organization, especially

smaller organizations are able to bear that financial cost. And this is something that you know, we've discussed at Culture@3, especially with those smaller cultural organizations that want to be, you know, ADA accessible, but do not have sometimes the means to create those spaces. So how is DCLA working to support cultural organizations to ensure that they can provide accommodations to their community?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much for that question. This is really something at the bedrock and foundation of why I'm excited to be the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. What we can do is to continue to work together. And as I always say, we can always do more with more. The more resources we're able to put together collaboratively, the more we're able to work in terms of increasing initiatives on the Council side, increasing funding on the administrative side, gives us the bandwidth to do so much more together. So really, the answer is we need more resources and more dollars to be able to continue to work collaboratively. But again, I have to bring it back to: So much of what happened on the federal level, we don't actually have jurisdiction in order to

enforce or to make happen. What we do have the power to do together is to incentivize, to promote, and to let all agencies and organizations know that a pathway forward in New York City is driven through accessibility and access for everyone. And that is what's going to be rewarded in this administration. That's what's going to be focused on in this administration. And that's what we need to do, collaboratively and together. And this hearing is really an incredible platform to do just that.

But I continue to want to emphasize, we need to fight together collaboratively for more access by creating more accessibility through our capital program, more employment and training opportunities. These are initiatives that can be accessed or created through the Council side, as well as the ability to have specific funds and line items specifically for cultural institutions that recognize and want to move forward with accessible programs like you spoke of that have just been far too expensive for too long.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And just to follow up on that, through your conversations with some of these cultural organizations and the institutions as well, what would be your estimated -- and you can

3 definitely get back to me later on this -- estimated
4 price tag for what that would look like to fully
5 provide the adequate funding that would allow these
6 cultural organizations to become as accessible as
7 they can be, and want to be?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Wow, what a dream question.

9 [laughter]

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: It helps us work through what
11 we're asking for, you know, in the next... next
12 budget dance.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You know, the New York City
14 Department of Cultural Affairs funds over 1000
15 organizations. And we would have to do an assessment
16 to understand on the capital side, what would be the
17 final number for every organization, if they put
18 together their wish list for capital improvements to
19 be completely accessible for the CDF organizations,
20 small, midsize and large institutions to put together
21 a number? I would be... it's almost asking me how
22 many stars are in the sky? I just really... It's...
23 it's a dream, and it's something that we should
24 certainly strive for, and I think it would be
25 important for us to be able to go back to our
cultural community and say, if you had your wish

list, as an organization to become completely accessible, what would that look like? And what would that cost? And that way, we have an idea collaboratively and together on what we can do in terms of pushing the budget collaboratively through partnership of how we can meet those goals of the organizations that we fund in the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Many cultural advocates have expressed to me an interest in the creation of a city grant, or funds for organizations to receive money to pay for accommodation resources, such as interpreters. Fiscal implications aside, is the creation of this fun feasible for DCLA to provide for our cultural community?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: To be able to have us a line item, if you will, within the agency to fund specific programs like signing interpreters, and that sort of thing? Is that your question?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes. Yes.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, we have something that exists similar to that: The Disability Forward Fund and Language Access Fund. The CreateNYC Cultural Plan, reported study found individuals connected to

cultural resources were correlated to better outcomes and health, safety and education. And so when we have the ability to have those within our institutions, it creates more accessibility. What needs to happen is that the Disability Forward Fund and Language Access Fund that we currently have, we need to do more with it. If we have more, we can do more. But the wonderful part is, is that the foundation already exists for it. We've already created an opportunity to have that space within our agency. And now we just have to better fund it.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I agree.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And we look forward to doing that with you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes. What are DCLA's efforts to provide guidance to organizations who do not know where to begin with providing accommodations, especially newly formed organizations?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That I would say we would have to do more on in terms of for newly formed organizations, we need to do more to be able to better-assist newly formed organizations with understanding how to infuse accessibility into almost the founding and the new creation of the institution.

I remember when I founded MoCADA, the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, maybe about 20... almost 25 years ago now, there wasn't that kind of blueprint in terms of how to do this, and how to make your institution more accessible. And so there are so many things that we can do with those advocates who are doing this work, in terms of perhaps when we do our CDF trainings, we can start to infuse more of that in terms of accessibility, but also what are the resources that organizations can go to, in order to understand how to formulate their institution to make it more accessible from the very beginning, so that it just becomes second nature in terms of how you begin and start an institution is infused with accessibility.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Also, I wanted to ask another question related to the action plan. We know that DCLA has been posting updated data for CreateNYC in the action plan. Have you considered changing or updating the action plan to do the pandemic or to reflect the changes thereof?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, the action plan is a ever-living, ever-growing document that's always going to evolve and change with the agency. The

CreateNYC document tends to grow and evolve with each Commissioner. So under Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl, this was really his brainchild that came out of the work of yours of advocates who had been pushing for a plan for the City of New York. Under Commissioner Gonzalo Casals, he was not able to move the Cultural Plan in a very robust way because he was dealing with the pandemic and the challenges of that. As the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs now, newly appointed three months in, I really want to take the work that was created and continue to evolve and grow and expand on the Cultural Plan. Because that plan really provides a strong foundation. And given the dynamics of the pandemic, which has shown us so much. I mean, if we were to go back to what was it would be a complete lost opportunity, and we would have missed the boat in so many ways in terms of how to reset, and to make sure that accessibility is at the foundation and at the bedrock of any future plans that we do within the City of New York as it pertains to culture. So in my new capacity as Commissioner, I really look forward to not only having been a legislator, and working to work with my colleagues to pass the Cultural Plan, but now having an opportunity

to evolve and grow the Cultural Plan along with each
of you here on the committee.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Another question that is, you
know, definitely one that I want to get out because
it is something that I've heard from advocates is
about companion seating and admission tickets for the
working attendants and aides for individuals with
disabilities who need to attend cultural events are
not always able to secure a ticket at a reduced cost.
What can the administration do to ensure a fair and
equitable plan across the board, so cultural
organizations can ensure everyone who wants to attend
a Broadway show, museum or theater performance can do
so?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We share in this desire and
this shared goal. We think that it's incredible and
that it's... it's something that is so needed
throughout the City of New York. As I pointed out in
my testimony at Wave Hill in the Bronx, attendants
who accompany visitors with disabilities are given
free admission. Staten Island Arts Teaching Artists
Institute last year offered training specifically for
art educators interested in working with people with
disabilities. We also support the work of groups

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3 whose missions are rooted in disability access,
4 inclusion, and artistry, such as Museum Access
5 Consortium, Theater Breaking Through Barriers, and
6 Art Beyond Sight to name just a few. But in our role
7 in the Department of Cultural Affairs, we don't have
8 the legal jurisdiction or authority to enforce this
9 to happen, but what we can do is to incentivize it,
10 to promote it, and to make sure that organizations
11 know that this is a priority for the City of New
12 York, and to look favorably upon those organizations
13 that do this kind of work in terms of making sure
14 that accessibility is at the foundation of their
15 mission statement, but that they also wake span to
16 actually do this work, and to then to make sure that
17 we highlight those organizations, that we make sure
18 that those organizations are the ones through NYC &
19 Co, and many others that we raise up and explain that
20 this is what we want to see in the City of New York.

21 So it's critical that we recognize that we
22 promote that we incentivize that this is the
23 direction that we want to move into, and that this is
24 the direction that the city's going in, particularly
25 in a post-pandemic City of New York.

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3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Would you be interested,
4 during your tenure on working alongside the Council,
5 on potentially putting something together that would
6 incentivize, you know, our cultural organizations and
7 institutions on, you know, providing those reduced
8 ticket costs to attendants to... that... that assist
9 people with disabilities?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would welcome, and love,
11 and be really excited by the opportunity to sit with
12 the committee and to be able to talk about best
13 practices, what's already happening in the sector,
14 and how we can work collaboratively to improve on
15 best practices and best models, and what we can do
16 collaboratively to make that happen.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Happy to hear it. What is
18 DCLA doing to bring in more members of the disability
19 community to our city's cultural institutions and
20 events? I know you touched on some of these and the
21 testimony, but I would definitely love to hear a bit
22 more. What outreach is being done to the community,
23 and is the city taking about... talking about
24 accommodations that are provided when doing the
25 outreach? For example, is the city doing targeted

outreach about getting more members of the disability
community to attend summer stage for example?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The Department of Cultural
Affairs is doing a great deal of work to encourage
group's efforts to inclusively reach online
audiences. In the fall of 2020. DCLA hosted
accessibility and inclusion in the virtual space, how
cultural organizations can adopt... adapt and
connect. It feature representatives of the New York
City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, the
Museum of Modern Art, Arts And Culture Access
Consortium, Dances for a Variable Population, and
Queens Theatre discussing best practices to increase
access for audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and
beyond.

So these opportunities to have convenings are
really the most powerful way that we can outreach and
from those convenings, to capture that information,
and to continue to create a relationship so that
information can be free flowing, and that we can
collaborate in that way. So I would say that
convenings have been what we have been doing, and we
certainly need to do more of it.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And can you provide an ETA for when the report for the 2021 action plan, which is a legally required report, will be available?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So the updates are actually on the CreateNYC Action Plan website. So you can actually see them there. I would say that the actual formal outcomes will be... have to come to you, I guess, within the next month or so.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And those are all the questions that I do have. I do want to acknowledge that Councilmember Louis is also here in attendance, and I will yield to my colleagues for questions.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. I'm excited to see so many familiar faces.

COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Next we will we'll go to Councilmember Dinowitz. Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Good morning.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Good morning Councilmember Dinowitz.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: It's good to see you.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Very good to see you.

3 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: And Lance,
4 congratulations on the new job. It's... I almost
5 want to turn around and see both of you behind me
6 right there. It's... This is like the reunion of
7 the century. Commissioner, I really value and
8 appreciate the way you spoke about concerns with
9 language around disability. I really, you know...
10 I...

11 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: As a teacher? As an
12 educator, yes I know.

13 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I really appreciate
14 that. And I like the way you framed it. It's like a
15 super ability. You know, I remember it was always so
16 inspiring that my students who struggled to read
17 would achieve the same if not more than some of
18 their... their peers without disabilities. The
19 families, of course, put in so much more love and
20 work to provide for their children. So I really
21 appreciate that. You know, there's a word that I
22 kind of bristle at, and that's "accommodations". You
23 know, it's not because we don't need them, but it's
24 this sort of idea to me that we design things for
25 a... I guess, a majority, or a good chunk of the
population, and then figure out how to accommodate

3 people later, which... and so I also value that
4 you're talking about access as a bedrock of new
5 institutions, that we should be universally designing
6 things...

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I agree.

7 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: ...for everyone to
8 access. You spoke a lot about capital. And I think
9 my feeling is when most people talk about
10 disabilities, they think about wheelchairs, right?
11 When you look at an accessible parking space, it's a
12 little cartoon of a person in a wheelchair. But
13 disabilities are so much more than that. So I want
14 to put capital to the side and just ask about the
15 programming. You mentioned a few examples in your
16 testimony about accessible programming. And you
17 know, as just a reminder, not all disabilities are
18 physical, right, and not all disabilities, you can't
19 see all of them. There are... Some are invisible.
20 But does DCLA assess the quantity, the number of
21 accessible programs for, as you mentioned
22 neurodiverse people, people with a vision or hearing
23 impairments... Do you assess the number of those
24 programs available to people in New York City and the
25 quality of those of those programs.

3 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm going to allow... I'm
4 gonna start, and I'll turn it over to Sarah Cobb, as
5 well to also expand on that. I appreciate your
6 desire to want to talk about language. I think it is
7 also important. And as an educator yourself, I know
8 that language is incredibly important for you when
9 you're dealing with students and young people, and
10 how they present themselves.

11 I want to highlight the great work being done to
12 ensure that people with disabilities have every
13 opportunity to participate in the cultural life of
14 our city as audience members with the joyful return
15 to live programming and full force, our fellow city
16 agencies are making accessible cultural programs easy
17 to find and connect with. At the Mayor's Office for
18 People with Disabilities, they maintain a list of
19 cultural and recreational resources for people with
20 disabilities, so perhaps we need to do more in terms
21 of promoting that this exists. And we can work
22 collaboratively together to make that happen.

23 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I'll be hon... It took a
24 little bit of searching to find it, but it's
25 definitely there. And the other part of the
question, though, was... You know... It's... The

programming may exist, but do you continue to work with the disability community to ensure that... that the programming that exists at these institutions actually meets... meets their needs? That it would... do you under... (crosstalk)

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I understand exactly.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say at this juncture, I do not know the answer to that question yet. I don't know how they actually capture how effective the modes of accessibility that they've put in place -- whether that's closed caption or whether that's signing -- the different elements that are put in place to make sure that it's more accessible. I think that's a great question in terms of: How do we capture that? And how do we move forward to making sure that the accommodations, are they meeting the expectations and the needs of the audiences who actually need those services? So I think that that's something that we can continue to work on collaboratively, to think about: How do we make sure that the issues that people are facing as a result of the accommodations that we've put forward? If they're not meeting those needs, how can we improve?

3 And if they are, then we can kind of check the box in
4 terms of something that we are doing good that we
5 need to expand upon.

6 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Right. I think an
7 example, I think, that we looked at in the Council
8 last year was the supertitles at the movies. And a
9 lot of the feedback that we got was that the devices
10 were available for people with vision impairment...
11 or sorry... with hearing impairments. But the
12 devices were also... were often broken or didn't
13 match up with the movie. So things like that, you
14 know, constantly assessing not just the existence of
15 the programs, but that they are actually meeting the
16 needs of people with disabilities. So, you know,
17 we'd love to follow up on... on that. Because, you
18 know, again, it's nice to check a box on a website,
19 but this isn't about us. It's about people, everyone
20 in our city having access to our cultural
21 institutions in a meaningful... a meaningful and
22 positive way.

23 I have one more question.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yes.

25 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. You mentioned
again, in your testimony, you mentioned some of the

work being done with high school students. I'm wondering what sorts of systemic approaches there are to working with other city agencies to do outreach to... to people with disabilities, to ensure they know both the... the job prospects available, the work being done there, and also accessibility to the institutions. And I'll give two examples, though it's not limited to these two. I... The Department of Finance, we have a list of people who are have disabilities who get DRI, rent exemptions. So we have an agency where people are, you know, declare that they have a disability. Are you working, for example, with Department of Finance to do outreach to those very tenants who get rent freezes? And of course, the big one for me, the Department of Education: We know exactly which students have an IEP. Is any work, you know, systemically... Not... not a teacher who goes out there are a principal who, you know, really, you know, goes the extra mile and figures this out for their students, but with... with The Chancellor, with the Department of Education, really making this systemic effort to ensure that students with disabilities have the job opportunities that you laid out here, and have the educational

opportunities that are specific to students with disabilities? And other cultural institutions?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I got... That's an awesome question. I'm going to actually turn it over to Sarah Cobb, who is doing a lot of work on that, and she will address that question.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Good. And let me say hello. We didn't serve together in this chamber. So I'll say hello, I'm Eric.

MS. COBB: Nice to meet you. I'm Sarah Cobb with the Department of Cultural Affairs. I serve as Disability Service Facilitator for the agency. And I just wanted to say in response to your question -- which I agree is critical question -- that the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities is... I would say, is a central spoke and hub in terms of providing extraordinary outreach to the disability community. And we, in turn promote on social media and in our own webinars and meetings, such as the Commissioner has mentioned, pushing information out to the community. But for example, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities has what we're, I believe, bi-weekly meetings with the disability community on the range of programming, in particular

3 new efforts during the COVID period, with the
4 disability community to ensure that all of the
5 information that was available from the Department of
6 Health, Department of Education, Mayor's Office of
7 Emergency Management, got out to that community. And
8 likewise, you know, pushes out information on social
9 media and on its website. So I think that partnering
10 with MOPD has... has been a very important part of
11 our effort to reach the community. But we continue
12 to have our own dialogue with the community and
13 welcome input at all times. I think continuing that
14 communication and dialogue is critical.

15 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah, I think it's
16 wond... and again, in the testimony... really
17 wonderful that these plans like this were made
18 actually with the disability community. And it's...
19 it's rare that I have to say that that's, you know, a
20 surprising thing. But we know, often, communities,
21 whether they're disability or any other community
22 that are impacted by the decisions aren't always at
23 the table. So that you're doing that as a great. My
24 question, I guess was more about the interagency
25 discussions. And we can go on and on. You know, the
DOT provides accessible parking permits. Does the

DOT... Is there any talk with the DOT about making sure people with disabilities who apply for those permits also know about the incredible work you're doing? As I mentioned, DOE with IEPs. You know, I mentioned our finance tree and Division Of... You know, we have all these agencies that work with the disability community in different ways. And I so value that you are also working with the disability community. I'm asking more about the interagency discussion and how we can really do that outreach and reach more people than we are reaching now.

MS. COBB: Really got it. I'm also very interested in the interagency conversations, and again with MOPD is really the mothership, we have now, as you may know, a network of Disability Service Facilitators throughout the city agencies. So we meet on a monthly basis and Disability Service Facilitators exchange information and gain information from MOPD and from each other, then go back to our own agencies and share information from... from our colleagues across the city. So that is a been a very active source of sharing, and we are able to put out information based on those calls. That is a very important way of reaching our own

community about the information, say that might otherwise be siloed in another community or another agency.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, this is my last question. I just want to try to get you know that... Thank you. All right. So I just want to make sure... So, if I am a person who receives DRIE, Disability Rent Increase Exemption, does that mean that I am also receiving direct outreach from DCLA or from the culture institutions? Because I'm now a person that, you know, the city knows has a disability. And there are... Whether it's reduced ticket prices or, you know, accessible exhibits, would I then be getting that direct specific outreach from DCLA?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I want to actually bring up at this time, Emily Sweet, who is the General Counsel and Deputy Commissioner for the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to further expand on your question.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Sure.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I definitely want us to benefit from the wealth of knowledge that she has actually running this agency.

3 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Commissioner, if we can just
4 swear her in as a witness. Thank you, do you affirm
5 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
6 the truth before this committee and to respond to
7 Councilmember questions, honestly?

8 MS. SWEET: I do.

9 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you.

10 MS. SWITT: Hi, I'm Emily Sweet, Deputy
11 Commissioner and General Counsel of MOPD. To address
12 your specific question about whether, you know,
13 cultural information is specifically shared
14 through... to people who agencies are able to
15 identify as people with disabilities, I'm not aware
16 of that. But that's something that is a great idea,
17 and something that we could look into.

18 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah. (crosstalk) I
19 didn't mean to interrupt you, I apologize.

20 MS. SWEET: No, that's okay. But as, as Ms.
21 Cobb testified, we do have regular meetings with the
22 disability community, with advocates and members of
23 the disability community, and those are very well
24 attended. And that's a great opportunity to share
25 information with organizations, and we really rely on
the organizations to then send information out. So

that's... So, no, we don't do directly with people
identified as people with disabilities.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: It's... it's very clear
that, you know, DCLA is definitely going in the right
direction. And our institutions are in the right
direction, when it comes to, you know, accessibility,
universal design, and, you know, being inclusive of
everyone. I'm really appreciative that you brought
up Wave Hill. That's in my district, and they just
did a... a accessibility project a few years back.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: But I think... You
know, we also acknowledge that there's always going
to be more work to do, whether it's physical
accessibility, or accessibility in programming, as I
mentioned earlier, and I think that as a city, who
has identified in one way or the other, whether
through IEPs, whether through parking permits,
whether through rent exemption, that we have an
incredible opportunity not just to have these
programs and these institutions in existence, but to
really, you know, do that outreach, and to make sure
that people know that they live in a city, whose
Institute whose arts and cultural institutions are

supportive and of them and accessible to them. And I would highly encourage... I would highly encourage all of you to figure out a way to talk to other agencies, to make that a reality, to really make sure that our... our neighbors with disabilities, have access to our institutions and have the knowledge of them. And I will just remind all my colleagues, and anyone who's watching that, you know, many of us may not have a disability now, but we are one step away, we are one accident away, we are one anything away from having a disability. You know, our... We never know what... what the needs of our children are going to be. Any single one of us can have a disability.

And... and again, I appreciate the work you're doing to make the city and our arts institutions accessible for everyone. We want to keep moving forward on that. So I thank you for your... your time. Chair. I thank you for the extended time. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think that I think that how you summarized this is so accurate in terms of: While we're here today to discuss art and culture, it's really a complete agency-wide, citywide, comprehensive, organic approach that needs to happen

because we are essentially undergoing an evolution.

And as you said... So that... We don't see things that we don't create for the whole, and then try to create some sort of special accommodations. That we build, and we create, understanding that everybody has differences, and that everybody has different needs, but we have to create a city that accommodates those differences and those needs in everything that we do. So that we're not adding on, in addition to, or making people feel otherwise or outside of, or not having the ability to experience the city in the same way or with the same ease as someone else. And we have the intelligence, the resources in order to do that. So I certainly look forward to working with you on that. As I spoke earlier, in terms of language is so important and so critical. It's important that we continue to evolve, recognizing that many people in the community appreciate and fought hard for the designation of disabled or disability. And many others are also looking to see themselves differently in many ways, as well, and to see that they have many attributes or super abilities that others don't have. So there's a lot of communication in terms of how we're changing even in

the BIPOC community, as an African American woman, no longer for myself wanting to be seen as a minority, or underserved or underrepresented, or having to wear titles that downplay my existence in order to get resources, help, and support on a grant application by checking the minority box. So we need to recognize that everybody has assets and value and that they don't have to undermine their value in order to get support. And I think that that's part of the evolution that we're seeing in the BIPOC and the disabled community in terms of seeing ourselves differently and our whole selves that are so diverse and so different.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

COUNSEL MCKINNEY: so with that this concludes the administration portion of the hearing and we will move to public testimony in just one moment. There are no more Councilmember questions. There are no Councilmembers online.

We will just take a couple of minutes and I will read the names of the panelists for our first public panel. The first public panel will be in-person only. Thank you.

[2.5 minutes of silence]

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3 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Okay. At this point, I will
4 read the names of the first panel. And apologies:
5 For the record, my name is Brenda McKinney, and I'm
6 the Committee Council, for the Committee on Cultural
7 Affairs, Libraries and International and Intergroup
8 Relations at the New York City Council.

9 The first panel will be again all in-person. It
10 is for individuals, Lisa B. Lewis, Lucy Sexton,
11 Sheila Lewandowski, and Eman Rimawi-Doster.

12 Apologies in advance for any unintended
13 mispronunciations, and thank you. We will wait two
14 minutes for panelists to approach the table.

15 [1 minute of silence]

16 Okay, we're going to move to public testimony.
17 So we'll begin with our first panel. We're changing
18 the order slightly based on how our panelists are
19 sitting. So we'll be moving from left to right at
20 the table beginning with Eman Rimawi-Doster, excuse
21 my pronunciation, then Sheila Lewandowski, Lucy
22 Sexton, and Lisa Lewis.

23 So please wait for the Sergeant for the Sergeant
24 to call the clock, and then you can begin your
25 testimony. For those testifying in person, there is
a large clock on the wall, and it will be two

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3 minutes. The first person again is Eman Rimawi-
4 Doster. And you may begin when the Sergeant calls
5 the clock. Thank you.

6 MS. DOSTER: Hi, good morning. My name is Eman
7 Rimawi-Doster. It's all good. It's a little bit of
8 a complicated name. And thank you so much for having
9 me here at the hearing on Cultural Affairs,
10 Libraries, International and Intergroup Relations.

11 Normally, I'm here from New York Lawyers for the
12 Public Interest talking about accessibility and
13 Access-A-Ride around our city. But today I wanted to
14 talk about arts and culture since that has been a big
15 part of my life for my entire 38 years. I also
16 wanted to share a comment from Mike Schweinsberg,
17 who's the president of the 504 Democratic Club and
18 Elizabeth Axel who's the president and CEO of Art
19 Beyond Sight, and they wanted to share. We know that
20 Commissioner Cumbo is a regular visitor of the 504
21 Democratic Club, and she is an active and educated
22 supporter of the disability community when she was in
23 City Council, and we look forward to continuing with
24 her support. She knows our community priorities and
25 we assure that intersectional Disability Rights,

Disability Justice, and Disability Pride are at her
heml.

So in addition to having been an organizer for 25
years, I've also been an active... active artist and
creative writer, I began organizing in high school at
15 to get a poetry performance group started. At
that same time I was diagnosed with lupus. It's been
my part of my life my entire life. From performing
all over the city at poetry readings, including Youth
Speaks, which is now Urban Word, which works with
high school students who perform spoken word poetry,
and participating in facilitating writing workshops
with the Asian American Writers Workshop, to being
accepted to a high school journalism program with New
York University for diversity of young women of color
to teaching creative writing classes to children ages
7 to 21 at the YMCA, to working on multiple murals
throughout the years, with multiple organizations, to
starting a clothing line for amputees and other
disabled folks to wear things that we actually wanted
to wear, to being a disability consultant for
multiple comic book companies, including DC Comics,
to being a regular panelist on museums and
institutions, and intersectional arts, race to

disability and culture I have done it all as a disabled New Yorker. And there's nothing wrong with saying the word.

I recently talked to students at the KAPPA, Knowledge and Power Preparatory Academy in the Bronx, and coupled with a cut program called the Center for Urban Pedagogy, they got funding to work on an accessibility program. And they did a whole presentation with a very beautiful 'zine of words and art and poetry and my statements, which I was very impressed by. And it reminded me of when I was 15 years old.

My statement is much longer so I can stop on that. But it's just talking about the importance of involving disabled New Yorkers in the arts. It's been part of my entire life. And I'm not just... Yes, I am a disabled person, I have lupus, I am an amputee, but I'm also very much an artist. And we have to be proud about our identities. And I am very proud to be a disabled person, and it took me a while to get there because of how society sees me. I am a whole person. And I just want to be treated that way with... in everything in New York City. So thank you so much.

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3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much.

4 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much for your
5 testimony. Before we call the next witness. I
6 neglected to add that we will be accepting written
7 testimony up to 72 hours after the hearing. So after
8 the start of the hearing, testimony can be sent to
9 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Or please feel free to
10 reach out to the Chair's office or the committee
11 staff for assistance with that. We'll move to the
12 next panelist now, which is Sheila Lewandowski. You
13 may begin when ready.

14 MS. LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you. I'm glad that
15 you'll take written because this is not finished.
16 And I'm actually not going to read it all. I'm going
17 to respond to some of the what the Commissioner is
18 saying, the DCLA said, but my name is Sheila
19 Lewandowski, co-founder and executive director of the
20 Chocolate Factory Theatre in Long Island City,
21 Queens. I identify as middle aged cisgender, white
22 woman of Eastern European heritage dealing with an
23 undiagnosed and relatively unseen disability. We
24 have a show opening tonight, where the lead artist is
25 recognized disabled as well. And we are planning a

full renovation with... with a lot of support from
the city.

I'm going to jump ahead. I want to talk a little
bit about capital. So we do need capital support.
And one of the problems with capital for smaller
organizations, or organizations with budgets under \$1
million outside of the center of Manhattan is some of
the rules and thresholds. If you're not in a city-
owned building, you have to have a project that's a
minimum of \$500,000. So if you want to redo your
sidewalk, you want to redo a bathroom, these... all
of these things fall with underneath... under that.
They also take an incredibly long time to get
through, so I feel like there needs to be some
changes on those thresholds. Maybe a tiered... a
tiered system for capital, and to make things more
accessible. We need larger spaces. I heard you say,
you called Culture Three yesterday talking about
strollers. So lobbies: This idea of space... that
every single inch of it must be used, it actually
must be more flexible. And the whole culture of
organizations needs to change. One of the things I
think would be really helpful is for DCLA to help
each, you know, organizations customize a 10 or 20

year plan, or 5 or 10 or 20 year plan. Because I think for myself, the whole culture had to change around when I can come in. I have to be able to change my schedule now, like at different moments, I have to have a place to lay down. And I'm... you know I'm you look at me and you don't think that, but every any person can have... have a disability.

Education: Can we better define it in a way that even the word disability is accessible, so that it is inclusive of all these different things. That helps me. Then I can say to people, "Well, are you accessible?" Now I know how to respond to that to audience and/or artists. But right now, there's a shame involved in our "oh, we're not accessible", and so we don't even fully respond to what is going to be... how we're going to be able to welcome people with all different kinds of abilities.

So I have some other notes. I had questions of just go quick. I'm curious to know what the department... what percent of Department of Culture funds supports programming? Because programming changes are very expensive to do, and we need them. The labor to provide sign language. The labor to provide translations. We have 75,000 people a year

3 look at our video archive, but it would cost us a
4 fortune to put in all of the... you know, the
5 captioning. So I have lots of other thoughts on
6 this, but I will I will email them in. Thank you
7 very much, Commissioner.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

9 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much. And we
10 will... We'll also be holding all questions to the
11 end of each panel.

12 The next panelist is Lucy Sexton from New Yorkers
13 for Culture In The Arts.

14 MS. SEXTON: Thanks so much. Thanks to the
15 Chair. Thanks, Councilmember Dinowitz. Thanks
16 Brenda. Oh, hold on. Let me get there. My name is
17 Lucy Sexton, I lead the cultural advocacy coalition,
18 New Yorkers for Culture And Arts. Our organization's
19 stated purpose is to create a future where every New
20 Yorker can engage in the community strengthening life
21 enriching power of culture. When we talk about New
22 Yorkers, we need to remember that 22% of our citizens
23 have some form of disability. That is more than one
24 in five people in the city. So we can't possibly
25 work for every New Yorker to engage in culture

without removing barriers that keep a fifth of our neighbors from experiencing it.

During the past few months, the cultural sector came together in a united ask for funding in the city budget, Culture Vibe. The plan called for the creation of a disability fund. This rose from a discussion among many smaller cultural organizations who desperately want to make their spaces and programs more accessible, but simply don't have the funds to do what it would take. Everything that makes work more accessible to audiences and artists comes with a cost: Hiring ASL, providing visual description, renovating doors, hallways, bathrooms providing programming with visual descriptions or tailored to neurodiverse participants, and making all events programs and programming hybrid, so they're available online as well as in person. They are necessary and costly undertakings. If DCLA had a dedicated fund that organizations could apply to, to help cover these costs to make programming more accessible to artists and audience, it would be a great start. I want to point out that the Disability Forward Fund is for programming, not for organizations to improve accessibility for all

2 artists and all audiences to all their programming,
3 not just disability focused work. So this is a new
4 fund we are calling for. Then you would begin to see
5 the full range of New Yorkers engaging in culture and
6 art. And to address Councilmember Dinowitz's
7 suggestions of interagency coordination for people
8 with disabilities. I would say that New Yorkers for
9 Culture and Arts has long advocated for a position in
10 the administration responsible for coordinating
11 cultural work in the many agencies in which we... in
12 which culture appears, right?, from disability to
13 aging, to education, to mental health, to criminal
14 justice, it would be a necessary addition to our city
15 administration.

16 I'll end by state citing the Stanford Social
17 Innovation Review article on the curb-cut effect.
18 It's pretty famous. A disability activist drew
19 attention to the difficulty of navigating curbs in
20 wheelchairs, if they use wheelchairs. And after much
21 advocacy, we got the near ubiquitous cuts in the
22 curbs to allow wheelchairs to get on and off. Lo and
23 behold, those curb cuts have also made it easier for
24 people pushing strollers, for people pulling rolly
25 bags and more. In short, the article points out that

when we make things more accessible for folks with disabilities, it often benefits a large portion of the non-disabled population. So when we have cultural spaces that are more usable for disabled artists and audiences, we will have spaces more welcoming for all New Yorkers. Truly, this is the future we are working toward where the dignity of every person is respected. And we all feel that improvements for some are improvements for all.

Thank you.

COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you very much. We'll now move to the last witness on this panel, which is Lisa B. Lewis. Thank you.

MS. LEWIS: Thank you very much. Thank you very much for welcoming me this morning. And thank you for the opportunity to share my observations with you as you consider these very, very important decisions. My name is Lisa B. Lewis and I am the founder of Omnium Circus. Omnium means of all and belonging to all. We're a not-for-profit organization that I just founded in 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, in the belief that full inclusion and representation in the arts leads to self-actualization, increased tolerance, and a better society... things you all

1 already know. We feature a diverse cast and crew
2 with multiple abilities, demonstrating to audiences
3 that anything is possible, that all people can
4 achieve their greatness regardless of their
5 challenges -- physical, emotional, neurological or
6 societal. Omnium is the first fully inclusive, fully
7 accessible circus performing arts company in the
8 nation, providing comprehensive access for all
9 audiences at every single performance, unites diverse
10 community through shared joy and laughter. Omnium
11 sees circus as a force for unity and systemic change
12 through entertainment, education, and employment.
13

14 I founded Omnium because there was no space
15 providing access for families at every single show.
16 One in four Americans, one in five New Yorkers has a
17 disability. If your child has autism, you can bring
18 them to the show on sensory friendly day. But what
19 if you have two other kids? One has baseball
20 practice that day, the other has a different
21 activity, the other has a different need? You can't
22 come to the same show on the same day with your
23 entire family. That divides families not unites
24 them, and your family is now torn. I was speaking
25 about a year ago with an incredible gentleman named

Eric Weihenmayer, who climbed to the top of Mount Everest. Eric is blind. He made it all the way to the summit of Mount Everest, and yet he had never witnessed a circus. He's got family, he's got kids, he'd been to the circus, and his kid always says, "Dad just sits there and listen to the music. We can't explain it. It's too much." There was no audio description. Our circus has audio description at every single performance.

Over the 30 years I've been working in this field, I've spoken with a lot of families who... for whom lack of access prevented their ability to attend performances. Disability is one thing that unifies people. It doesn't care what color you are, it doesn't care what socioeconomic... to what socioeconomic level you were born. It doesn't care if you're male or female or non-binary, it doesn't care. As everyone has said by providing access, we include all four out of four people five out of five people. We include caregivers, family friends, not only the person with the disability, but the entire community that surrounds them, and together we can enjoy the arts. Moving beyond audience access into representation, one cannot begin to dream of becoming

to that to which one has never been exposed. As an inclusive performing arts center... performing arts company. We pride ourselves in balancing races, ethnicities and abilities. We must provide interpreters for rehearsal. The additional funding that has been mentioned here would be a godsend to us. We are a new organization and being under three years, we don't qualify for a lot of the larger fundings. As a smaller organization new to the scene, access to interpreters, to assistance with that would be life changing. We're doing a show next Saturday we have to deaf performers. And I have to do the interpretation. And I'm not a certified interpreter, because we couldn't afford an interpreter all day. That's not okay. We're making due. But improvements would be so welcome. And I want to leave you with one, quote: "Diversity is having a seat at the table. Inclusion is having a voice. Belonging is having that voice be heard." Thank you for welcoming all of us to belong. And thank you for listening.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much to each of you for testifying. I appreciate each of the sentiments that you've shared. It definitely helps

3 me out within my role as Chair on this committee. I
4 know that Councilmember Dinowitz wants to share some
5 words?

6 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah. First, I just...
7 It's... it's not often the case, but I want to
8 acknowledge, you know, just give a shout out to
9 Commissioner Cumbo, who's still here listening to
10 testimony. I know, very often the commissioners
11 are... you know, they leave after they testify. So
12 thank you. Just to... Eman... I said.

13 MS. RIMAWI-DOSTER: Hi.

14 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: ...and Sheila, I also
15 want to thank you for in the different ways you said
16 embracing the term "disability". And you know, and I
17 think that's there's... as you said, no shame in and
18 I really appreciate that, as it is kind of making it,
19 "this is who we are, and this is part of how we talk
20 about it and how we address it." And Eman, you
21 mentioned something about DC Comics and writing
22 workshops, I just want to invite you anytime you want
23 to come to the 11th Council District, and talk about
24 or do workshops with children, young adults, about...

25 MS. RIMAWI-DOSTER: Your dad and I do Access-A-
Ride workshops on a regular basis. And I've gone out

to senior centers with him a number of times. So I would gladly come out there and talk to anybody about anything artistic, because it's important. And what I want to do is... I didn't have any examples of myself, seeing someone older with lupus, like, you know, famous people did not come out with their autoimmune disorders when I was a teenager. And so if I had that example, to say, Oh, I could be the next Toni Braxton, or Nick Cannon, or... or Lady Gaga, because they all have lupus. That would have been a great example for me. So I would absolutely come talk to those children. I love kids. So...

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: That's... Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I wish one of our members on the committee were here. Shahana Hanif.

MS. RIMAWI-DOSTER: Yeah, I'm familiar with her as well. Yeah. And I think that she's amazing. And we need more representation in City Council around that, because it's... we need to normalize disability. And when you normalize disability, you don't "other" us, you make us part of the community. And when you other people, whether it's, you know, race, class, gender, or disability, suddenly you're

dehumanizing them, and I just want to be treated like
the human being, and that includes access, you know,

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for being here
today.

MS. RIMAWI-DOSTER: Thank you for having me. I
appreciate it. I mean Access-A-Ride did make me
late, but I made it.

COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Alright, thank you so much to
this panel. That concludes panel one. I will read
the names of the second panel.

The next panel will be fully remote and this will
be our last panel of today. Pending that no one...
no other register witnesses attend.

Please note that hearing registration is still
open, you can sign up to testify, please sign up on
the registration page and we will be monitoring. You
can also submit written testimony of just 72 hours
after the close of the hearing. The next panel,
panel two, and the final panel will be Cheryl
Warfield from Advance More Opera, Beth Prevor,
Miranda Hoffner, from Lincoln Center, and Ariel
Herrera. We will just wait one moment before moving
to testimony.

Okay, and just like with remote hearings, Ms. Warfield, will be first. You may begin your testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock. There will be a two minute clock. Thank you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. WARFIELD: Good morning. Thank you Chair Ossé and committee members for hearing my testimony, and thank you to the City Council for the historic increase in the fiscal year 23 budget for Arts and Culture. I'm Cheryl Warfield, a professional opera singer and founder and artistic director of More Opera, a community based nonprofit blazing a trail in culturally responsive musical programming and arts education in New York City. I testify today as Interim Secretary for the New York Opera Alliance, or NYOA, a consortium of small independent opera companies united in making opera available... available for every New Yorker. Through the leadership of our president, Mariana Mott Neuwirth, NYOA began a conversation with our cohorts about ableism last February with a panel of Deaf and Blind activists to discuss how opera presenters could make productions more accessible. Hearing their stories inspired the desire to make DEI and accessibility

changes. However, certified interpreters and other accommodation resources are cost prohibitive for most organizations with budgets under \$100,000 per year. But communities with the least access to culture and its benefits are often systematically left out of government funding. I urge the Council and Administration to target dedicated funding to equip New York institutions with the tools, resources, and information needed to stop ableism. I am extremely proud of the leadership role NYOA has taken to educate against ableism and believe it serves as a model for cultural groups throughout the city. Culture@3, and New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MS. WARFIELD: ...are also accessibility for all. Thank you for this important hearing, and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

COUNSEL MCKINNEY: We'll now... we'll now move to our next witness, Beth Prevor. You may begin when the sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 MS. PREVOR: Thank you, I want to thank the
4 Council for this opportunity to talk about access in
5 the arts. I am the Executive Director of Hands On
6 Signed Interpretive Performances, a small nonprofit
7 providing access services to theaters for the deaf
8 community. This morning, I'm here to express my
9 concerns about access specifically as it relates to
10 sign language interpreters. My essay this morning is
11 about money. When we talk about access money, it's
12 oftentimes what we're not supposed to talk about.
13 But the reality is, as more deaf artists raise our
14 stages, we need more interpreters for rehearsals,
15 which means we need more training. If we then follow
16 the full arc of the arts theaters then need money for
17 sign interpreter performances, so that deaf audiences
18 can attend and see their community on stage.
19 Theaters need information, they need referrals, they
20 need help in providing services like Hands On. But
21 honestly having said all that, we are often unable to
22 know how to guide them in that pursuit. The
23 unfortunate reality is that for all our talk about
24 equity access and inclusion, until there is an
25 outside source of money for services such as sign
language interpreters, along with a centralized

resource for information, I fear that true equity is going to be hard to achieve. I do this work because I love the theater. We started hands on so deaf audiences will be able to attend theater that had been inaccessible to them. Now, 40 years later, we're seeing amazing things. We're not only providing access to audiences, but seeing more representation from deaf artists onstage backstage, and everywhere else in the arts. All this comes with a cost both monetarily and in the human resource needed our interpreters. We need more interpreters, more of us who are qualified and trained. We are a finite resource that is being stretched to the limit. And we are metaphorically speaking, "drowning". My testimony this morning is to stress that until someone somewhere creates an outside source of money for services, achieving true equity is going to be hard to realize. I leave you with that final plea. We need your help. Thank you for your time and attention.

COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for your testimony. We'll now move to the next witness, which is Miranda Hoffner, from Lincoln Center.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

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3 MS. HOFFNER: Thank you. Good afternoon to cero
4 psi and the members of the committee. Thank you so
5 much for raising the importance of expanding New
6 York's access and cultural institutions... expanding
7 access to New York's cultural institutions for the 1
8 million New Yorkers living with disabilities. My
9 name is Miranda Hoffner, I'm the Associate Director
10 of Accessibility. And just to share a visual
11 description, I'm a white woman in my early 40s. I
12 have red curly hair and wearing a tan blazer in green
13 tarp and a headset, and my pronouns are she her.
14 Lincoln Center has been serving this community for
15 nearly 40 years. With the Department of programs and
16 services for people with disabilities that was
17 created in 1985. It was the first department of its
18 time, at the time that a major performing arts
19 organization. Today after this prolonged period of
20 isolation due to the pandemic it is even more
21 important to assure ensure that our programs are
22 accessible for all New Yorkers, as people are hungry
23 to reclaim spaces to gather. New York's Lincoln
24 Center's approach to accessibility mirrors the
25 transformation of our performing arts spaces to be
more inclusive of our audiences identities and access

needs by design, not as an afterthought or add on.

We recognize that the access needs must be integrated in the creative process for all of our work, and that our stages must reflect differences and interconnectedness, and that we're creating space where everyone feels welcomed.

We ensure accessibility and five ways: We name it. We have a commitment to accessibility and inclusion that's clearly posted on our website for each season and each event page. That includes all access accommodations available for each event. As previous folks who have testified have mentioned, that certainly comes as a... as a great cost to ensure accommodations and inclusion and the support of City Council is... is integral in being able to provide those accommodations to standard. Number two is the environment. Lincoln Center has made strides to ensure that our physical and online spaces are accessible for people with disabilities. All of our buildings include accessible entrances, accessible seating, companion seating, assistive listening devices and large print programs. We regularly offer American Sign Language Interpretation Captioning, Audio disruption programs. And we also, number three,

proactively incorporate feedback from the disability community. As an institution, we recognize that accommodations and programs for people with disabilities is never a one-size-fits-all solution. Being truly welcoming and accessible as a civic space is an ongoing process. We program with intentionality, we are proud to celebrate Disability Pride month in July, we have a range of programs that feature disabled and deaf artists, including feature of Deaf Broadway. And lastly, jobs. We have a program called Access Ambassadors, the job training initiative for high school students with disabilities, to learn how to work in the arts field. We had over 140 New York City students who participate in this program. It was the largest cohort we've had to date. And we find it incredibly important to build... build capacity and provide jobs for folks with disabilities within the arts. Lincoln Center is committed to New York City being a place where everyone is welcomed and where they belong, and we continue to engage with them where they can continue to engage as lifelong learners in the arts. We seek to be a civic hub for all.

Thank you.

3 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much for your
4 testimony. We'll now move to the last witness on
5 this panel. This is also the last witness for this
6 hearing. will check for anyone we inadvertently
7 missed at the end of this panel. But the next
8 panelist is Ariel Herrera. You may begin when the
9 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

11 MR. HERRERA: Thank you for the opportunity to
12 speak to you today. My name is Ariel Herrera, and I
13 am the Research and Advocacy Manager for Dance/NYC.
14 Visual check, I am an Asian American of Filipino
15 descent. I have black hair and wear reading glasses,
16 and I'm currently wearing a gray shirt. Dance/NYC is
17 the only service organization for the dance industry
18 in the metropolitan New York City area. And it's
19 action-oriented research and advocacy seek to present
20 and advance the interests of the dance sector.
21 Dance/NYC is committed to addressing issues of
22 disability equity and justice, and since 2014 has
23 produced three reports on disability dance artistry,
24 hosted and organized numerous dialogues, convenings,
25 and town halls and disability and dance, created the
Disability Dance Artistry Fund to generate dance

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making and performance by and with disabled artists,
establish a residency program to expand opportunities
for dancers with disabilities, and to advance
accessibility and equity. But much more needs to be
done. Dance/NYC joins colleagues advocates working
across creative disciplines in thanking you for your
leadership and requesting the city to expand dance
making and creative opportunities for disabled dance
artists and companies performing integrated and
disability dance artistry through grants,
residencies, and rehearsal space subsidies, expand
dance education opportunities for disabled children,
particularly in public schools, ensuring
accessibility in public school buildings and their
dance facilities, expand opportunities for training,
certifying, employing, and investing in disabled
dance educators, and last but not least, address
infrastructure buildings and technology issues to
dedicated capital funding to ensure all performance
spaces are accessible and ADA compliant for both the
audience and performing artists. The city government
must invest in arts and culture in every community
and build a city where every New Yorker...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

3 MR. HERRERA: ...community is strengthening Power
4 of Culture. We call on your leadership to make
5 access to the arts with disabled people a priority
6 for the city's Cultural Plan and invest in dedicated
7 funding for disability arts. Thank you so much.

8 COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much for your
9 testimony. This concludes the public. This
10 concludes the panel, but it also includes the public
11 portion of our testimony. We are not seeing anyone
12 else logged in who is registered. But for the
13 purposes of the record, I will read names, and then
14 we'll check for anybody that we have inadvertently
15 missed. So Jean Ryan from Disabled In Action of
16 Metropolitan New York, or DIA, Benjamin Marzel from
17 the American Museum of Natural History and Clifton.

18 Okay, and at this point, if we have inadvertently
19 missed anyone, and you were on the Zoom and would
20 like to testify, or you were in the room, and we have
21 not noted you, or we do not have your witness slip,
22 if you can please raise your hand in Zoom or just let
23 us know that you're here in person. We'll wait one
24 moment.

25 Okay, and we're not seeing any hands. So we will
move to the Chair for final remarks. Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you to everyone that has
4 testified. Our cultural community is certainly a
5 staple of New York City. Locals and tourists alike
6 visit our cultural institutions, from our museums to
7 our Broadway shows, to our concerts and performance
8 venues. To experience the stories and sites that
9 bring us joy and excitement, the beauty of arts and
10 culture is that it is meant to be shared with all who
11 seek it, is meant to unite and bridge us all, no
12 matter who we are. When the proper accommodations
13 are not available for those who need it, it is a
14 disservice to the mission of the arts and culture, a
15 space that welcomes all, because we are now excluding
16 instead of including, and not everyone is able to
17 enjoy the beauty of what this community has to offer.

18 As I mentioned at the start of this hearing, it
19 is imperative that we make the cultural community a
20 space that's supposed to embrace welcome, welcoming,
21 and community inclusive for all. People with
22 disabilities should be a focal point, not an
23 afterthought. And I urge Commissioner Laurie Cumbo,
24 even though I know that she will be on my side and
25 the Department of Cultural Affairs, to ensure that
our cultural community is open for all. As Chair of

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3 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
4 International Intergroup Relations. I look forward
5 to working with the administration, advocates and the
6 cultural community as a whole to bring inclusivity
7 and accessibility to all.

8 Thank you all for your time today. And with
9 that, I hereby adjourn this hearing.

10 [Gavel]
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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date 07/31/2022